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IN A JUNE 1843 PUBLIC MEETING, Joseph Smith was asked why "gathering . . . the people of God" was such an important principle. He responded with this lively bit of wisdom: "A man never has half so much fuss to unlock a door, if he has a key, as though he had not, and had to cut it open with his jack-knife."[1] Smith went on to explain that the "key" to which his statement alluded was temple building: The gathering of Israel was crucial to establishing Zion because it facilitated the construction and use of temples.

1. Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1961), 308. Willard Richards's diary records the statement this way: "never is half so much fuss to unlock a door if you have a key or have not. or have to cut it out with a jack knife." Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon

But what are we to make of Joseph Smith's choice of comparisons? The mental image—turning a key rather than laboriously cutting out the lock—would have been available to any curious listener on hand in Nauvoo that day. But for members of the Church—and, to a lesser degree, Christians of other denominations—"key" would have called up a dense network of literal and theological associations. While contemporary Latter-day Saints have come to equate "keys" primarily with religious authority, early members might have associated the term with at least two distinct concepts beyond the now-conventional sense of priesthood "keys of the kingdom." These include, first, a "key" as an important interpretive principle that can increase individual understanding, and, second, the idea that certain sacred "keywords" could allow the Saints to return to the presence of God.

My approach to studying the use of this important word in early Mormon discourse is threefold: first, I work to recuperate and differentiate some of the now less-familiar senses of the word "keys" as it appears in Joseph Smith's teachings; second, for each use, I evaluate possible precedents or correlates in Smith's linguistic environment; finally, I argue that, even when the Mormon prophet drew on secular or religious meanings available in his culture, his use of "key" was invariably heuristic and transformative. That is, Joseph Smith regularly adopted early nineteenth-century meanings of the word and then modified them—sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically—to more effectively introduce and explain complex and innovative theological principles. For this reason, in addition to tracing the history of a single word as it moved into Mormon theology, I hope my project will provide some insight into the role of language and linguistic change within that belief system. Specifically, I contend that a striking characteristic of Smith's prophetic[2] gift was his ability to make use of the inherently protean character of language to bring about theological innovation.

This area of inquiry is particularly important because LDS scrip-

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W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 210.

2. "Prophetic" here can be taken two ways: in the literal sense of a human acting as a revelatory mouthpiece for deity, or in the broader sense of a special rhetorical mode characterized by some combination of charismatic, sublime, persuasive, or theologically innovative speech. I consider Joseph Smith's "prophetic speech" to fit both definitions.

ture and revelation often seem to advance two different views of language's capacity to convey truth. On the one hand, some utterances, particularly those spoken by Deity, are considered to be dependable and consistent in their meaning. God can express truth by means of human language: "These words are not of men nor of man, but of me" (D&C 18:34-35); furthermore, this truth-capability *can* carry over into the realm of the human utterance, at least in the case of prophetic speech: "Whether by mine own voice or the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38).

Yet other scriptural utterances imply that human speech and writing reflect humankind's "lost and fallen state" and is therefore fallible (1 Ne. 10:6). In such passages, language itself becomes an important feature of the encumbering web of confusion and weakness that characterizes mortality—part of what causes humans to see the world as if "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12). For instance, revelations on missionary work suggest that one's native tongue constitutes ways of knowing to such a degree that differences between languages cannot be permanently circumvented even by the gift of tongues. (1 Corinthians 14 addresses the limitations of this first use.) Rather, each individual must "hear the fullness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language" (D&C 90:11). Elsewhere, Mormon scripture suggests that even God must take the fallibility of human communication into account in composing his utterances. For example, the Lord explains that while "these commandments are of me," they are also "given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). Syntactic parallelism associates "weakness" and "language," suggesting that, when God crafts revelation, he takes the weakness of the recipient's understanding into account.[3]

Armand L. Mauss expresses the tenet implied in these passages of early Mormon scripture: "Since prophets and religions always arise and

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3. See also D&C 29:32-33: The Lord cannot express the true relationship of the "temporal" to the "spiritual" creation in human terms. The Saints are to think through the sequence of creation using the following conundrum: "First spiritual, secondly temporal, which is the beginning of my work; and again, first temporal, and secondly spiritual, which is the last of my work." But this paradoxical construction is a necessary misrepresentation, since God himself does not think of the creation in temporal terms: "Unto myself my works have no end, neither beginning." He describes his deliberate choice of an inaccurate representa-

are nurtured within a given cultural context, itself evolving, it should not be difficult to understand why even the most original revelations have to be expressed in the idioms of the culture and biography of the revelator."[4] If language is bound up with the traditions and assumptions of a particular people, then study of a given revelation must take into account the linguistic culture in which that statement appeared. For instance, Nephi argues that Isaiah presents serious difficulties to the non-Jewish reader because no people can understand "the things which were spoken unto the Jews . . . save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews" or unless they have "the spirit of prophecy." Because his people are unfamiliar with Jewish tradition, Nephi offers his own supplementary prophecy that will—because of its "plainness"—be easier for the Nephites and all other readers to understand (2 Ne. 25:1–6).

The question of language's stability becomes particularly complex when studying the early Mormon canon, where so many different kinds of verbal and written statements qualify as revelation. That is, while some passages in the Doctrine and Covenants give direct voice to Deity ("Listen to the voice of Jesus Christ, your Lord" [D&C 27:1]), other revelations are clearly grounded in Joseph Smith's own personal language choices. His letters (D&C 128), his explanations of important concepts (D&C 130), and his offered prayers (D&C 109) are all accepted as inspired discourse.

Yet those revelations that explicitly discuss Joseph Smith's speech and writing often suggest the fallibility of even his language. In 1831, for example, a revelation voiced by the Lord defends Smith's status as God's chosen mouthpiece, even as it acknowledges the limitations of his language: "Your eyes have been upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun. and his language you have known, and his imperfections you have known; and you have sought in your hearts knowledge that you might express beyond

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tion as an effort to "[speak] to you that you may naturally understand." See also 2 Nephi 31:3 (the Lord "[speaks] to men according to their language, unto their understanding") and Ether 12:25 ("when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words").

4. Armand L. Mauss, "Culture, Charisma and Change: Reflections on Temple Worship," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 80.

his language" (D&C 67:5).[5] This nuanced statement confirms Smith's declarations as revelation, even as it validates the Saints' desire to acquire a kind of knowledge that goes "beyond his language." This paradox—that eternal truth lies beyond the fallen idiom in which it must be expressed—is perhaps most poignantly stated in a prayer Joseph Smith included in an 1833 letter to W. W. Phelps: "Oh Lord deliver us in due time from the narrow prison almost as it were total darkness of paper pen and ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect language."[6]

This recognition by Mormonism's first prophet that language is "crooked broken scattered and imperfect," together with scriptural indications that a revelation's text cannot always be cleanly separated from the recipients' linguistic limitations, suggests important areas of historical and linguistic inquiry. For instance, how might early audiences, unfamiliar with Mormon theology but steeped in the religious and secular discourses of the early Republic (1776–1861) understand a certain word or phrase? How might already familiar meanings have inflected an audience's understanding of Joseph Smith's instruction? And, over time, what new or hybrid meanings do such words acquire in Mormon discourse? Such questions remind us that Church leaders, early members, and potential converts brought their whole linguistic world with them when they gathered to Zion. An approach to Mormon history that acknowledges both the fallibility of language and its flexibility over time may provide an alternative to the preoccupation with questions of influence that sometimes threatens to render Mormon historical scholarship more polemical than inquiring. I believe it is more profitable to focus on the ways in which available words retain old meanings and accrue new ones in the Mormon

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5. The Lord challenges Smith's doubters to produce anything equal to "even the least that is among [his revelations]" (D&C 67:6–7). Explicit parallels are drawn between the verbally ungifted Moses and his more articulate spokesman Aaron with the relationship between Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (D&C 28:2–4; D&C 8:6). See Exodus 4:10, in which Moses calls himself "slow of speech, and of a slow tongue."

6. Joseph Smith, Letter to William W. Phelps, January 11, 1833, in Dean Jessee, ed., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 261–62.

context than to debate whether Joseph Smith did or did not "get" impor-
tant terms from a particular source.[7]

Tracing the etymology of "key/keys" provides an important test case
for such an approach. After all, it is clear that Joseph Smith was not start-
ing from etymological scratch with the term, since a variety of religious
and colloquial "keys" would have been familiar to new and potential Mor-
mon converts. In this essay, I identify three important nineteenth-century
meanings of "key" and "keys." For each, I trace Smith's adoption, adapta-
tion, and extension of these meanings between 1829 and 1844. I con-
clude that, during this time, three of Mormonism's most central and in-
novative doctrines (priesthood authority and structure, access to knowl-
edge about the eternities, and the granting of temple "signs and words")
turn on this important linguistic "key."

"The Keys of the Kingdom"

Contemporary Latter-day Saints are perhaps most familiar with
"key" and "keys" in terms of priesthood office and authority. In the Mor-
mon record, fully documented instances of the association between
"keys" and specific authority occur as early as December 1830, when a rev-
elation tells Joseph Smith: "by the keys which I [Christ] have given shall
[Israel] be led, and no more confounded at all" (D&C 35:24–25).[8] Simi-
lar connections between "keys" and Church governance can be found in a
number of the religious denominations active in the early Republic. At

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7. The increased availability of online, full-text resources makes this mo-
ment particularly good for such projects, since researchers can rapidly discover
how words may or may not have been used before entering Mormon discourse.
For instance, Paul Mouritsen, "Secret Combinations and Flaxen Cords," *Journal
of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 64–77, makes astute use of the Making
of America Archives at the University of Michigan (http://moa.umdl.umich.edu)
and Cornell University (http://moa.cit.cornell.edu/moa) to identify how "secret
combination" was used in a wide variety of contexts during the early nineteenth
century.

8. D&C 7:7 and D&C 27:8, 12–13, 27 in our current edition mention
"keys." These sections also appear in *A Book of Commandments, for the Government
of the Church of Christ, Organized according to Law, on the 6th of April 1830* (Zion
[Independence, Mo.]: W. W. Phelps & Co., 1833) but without those verses. Sec-
tion 13 (Joseph and Oliver's ordination to the Aaronic Priesthood), although
dated May 1829, did not appear in print until 1842, although Cowdery's account
of the same episode, which mentions the "keys of the Gospel of repentance," ap-

the same time, opinions about what authoritative "keys" might actually be or do varied widely. As a result, attitudes toward the word itself were also diverse, ranging from acceptance and frequent use to relative disuse or even outright hostility.

Christ's statement to Peter provided the original rationale for associating "keys" with religious authority structures:

> Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
>
> And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matt. 16:18-19)

With these verses as a guide, Catholic theologians had long argued that the "keys of the kingdom" authorized Church governance and grounded the doctrine of papal succession. In the Catholic tradition, the power of the "keys" is the authority to excommunicate and pardon.[9]

Reinterpreting this passage was central to the origins of Protestantism. Martin Luther, while accepting the concept that the power of the

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peared in *Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (October 1834): 13-15. Some scholars take these and other passages (D&C 68:15; D&C 5:6, 13-14, 17), missing from the 1833 Book of Commandments, as evidence that Mormon conceptions of priesthood authority changed significantly between 1829 and 1835. See D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1994), 14-17; Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 110-11, 119; and Wilford C. Wood, *Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, 2 vols. (N.p.: Privately published, 1962), 2:60. For a valuable compilation of textual differences between the 1833 *Book of Commandments* and the 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints: Carefully Selected from the Revelations of God . . .* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams & Co., 1835), see Robert J. Woodford, *The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1974).

9. For a review of the interpretation of this passage in medieval Catholicism, see Joseph Ludwig, *Die Primatworte Mt. 16,18.19 in der altkirchlichen exegese* (Münster, Germany: Aschendorffsche Verlag, 1952). Also, see Carl M. Leth, "Balthasar Hubmaier's 'Catholic' Exegesis: Matthew 16:18-19 and the Power of the Keys," *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, edited by Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 103-17. More recently, G. H. Joyce, "Power of the Keys," in *The

"keys" was exercised primarily through excommunication and pardon, rejected lineal succession. Citing Matthew 18:18, in which Christ grants all twelve disciples the power to "bind" on earth and in heaven, Luther concluded that "the keys" were not meant to be held by one man alone but were "given to St. Peter in the stead of the whole Church, and not for his own person."[10]

Over the next several centuries, numerous Protestant denominations followed Luther in arguing that the "keys of the kingdom" were held by the body of the Church. In 1610, for instance, Puritan John Robinson rejected the lineal transfer of authority and the claim that the "keys" are "tied to any office, or order in the church" as a "deep delusion of the antichrist." Instead, keys should be considered synonymous with the "gospel of Christ," which, in turn, was clearly intended as a gift to the whole church: "It therefore followeth, that the keys are given to all and every member alike."[11] In 1644, John Cotton responded to Robinson's broad definition in an unsuccessful attempt to differentiate the function of multiple "keys." Cotton saw danger in theologizing about the term, stating that the "Keyes of the Kingdom. . . being Allegoricall, are therefore somewhat obscure: and holding forth honor and power in the Church, are

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Catholic Encyclopedia, edited by Charles G. Herbermann, 15 vols. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), 8:632, acknowledges the historical association of the "keys" with the gift of ecclesiastical authority "in its widest scope," a gift "peculiar to St. Peter and his successors in the chief pastorate"; however, Joyce also stresses that the "keys" to "bind" and "loose" refer specifically to the "power to forgive sins." F. A. Sullivan, however, updating the same entry in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, edited by Bernard L. Marthaler, 14 vols. (New York: Thomson/Gale, 2003), 8:162–63, elides the issue of forgiveness entirely, stressing that Christ conferred upon Peter "vicarious authority over His household on earth, that is, over the Church."

10. According to Luther, "If a Christian sins, he shall be rebuked, and if he does not amend his ways, he shall be bound and cast out . . . . This the power of the keys." Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Churches," *Works of Martin Luther* (no translator identified), 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1915–32), 1:373.

11. John Robinson, "Mr. Bernard's Reasons against Separation Discussed," *The Works of John Robinson*, 3 vols (1610; reprinted, Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1851), 2:157. Like Robinson's tract, many of the Puritan documents I cite were frequently republished during the nineteenth century.

therefore controversall."[12] Yet the allegorical and controversial nature of "Keyes" did not deter Cotton from attempting a more precise definition differentiating between keys in general (held by the laity) and the keys of governance (held by the elders). While Robinson's doctrine seemed to authorize how much self-determination individual churches could have, Cotton's goal was to maintain orthodoxy across congregations. The "key of *power* . . . belongeth to the church itself" and is, along with the "*key of knowledge*" (which, for Cotton, was simply another name for "*key of Faith*" mentioned in Luke 11:52), "common to all believers." In contrast, though, the "key of *Authoritie* or *Rule*" belonged exclusively to "the Elders of the Church."[13] By defining these categories, Cotton hoped to retain the shared inheritance of "keys" that had always been fundamental to Protestantism while allowing some degree of authority and hierarchy.

However, Cotton's redefinition of the "keys of the kingdom" was somewhat anomalous in the Puritan tradition. Rather than accepting and elaborating Cotton's fine distinctions, later figures—particularly those writing in the American context—avoided attaching specific functions to specific keys. For instance, in 1712, Richard Mather, father of the eminent Increase Mather, first apologized for even using the term "keys," and then argued that "the Keys of the Kingdom of heaven, *whatsoever they are,* be committed to the whole Church, & not to one Person only."[14] Mather's statement reinforces the distribution of authority crucial to Protestantism

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12. John Cotton, *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven and Power Thereof, according to the Word of God . . . Tending to Reconcile Some Present Differences about Discipline* (London: M. Simmons for Henry Overson, 1644; reprinted, Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1843), 19.

13. Cotton concedes that Christ gave "the power of the keys to the Body . . . of the Church," but conferred "the power of retaining or remitting of sins (that is . . . the whole power of the keys) to all the Apostles as well as to Peter" and the Apostles, in turn, "commended the rule and government of every particular Church to the Elders." Ibid., 23–24. He also discusses the "key of *power* or *liberty*" (26), "the *key of Faith*" (29), the "*key of Order*" (29), and the "key of *Authoritie* or *Rule*" (35, 51–52).

14. Mather used the term "keys" only, he said, in hopes that a brief discussion would "avoid confusion." Richard Mather, *An Answer to Two Questions: Question I. Whether does the power of church government belong to all the people, or to the elders alone? Question II. Whether does any church power, or any power of the keys be-*

as far back as Luther, but avoids offering more than a vague sense of what the keys might actually be or do.

Other American denominations were moving even more briskly away from governing "keys" toward a less hierarchical religious structure and rhetoric. For instance, early nineteenth-century pamphlets in which ministers described their own callings often reveal a strong distaste for claims to authority. In 1819, Joseph Tuckerman reminded a newly appointed Unitarian minister and his congregation that no "authority" or "dominion" comes to a minister by virtue of his position; it is wrong to "pretend that we confer any new powers by the acts of ordination."[15] Among Baptists and Quakers, the "pastoral tie" was considered a contractual arrangement between clergy and congregation, a position "diametrically opposed to the doctrine of the Romish church, which regards orders as a holy sacrament, conveying an indelible character, flowing down by regular succession from the apostles."[16]

When "keys of the kingdom" appears in the religious discourse of the early Republic, it is usually derided as a "Romish" error. For instance, Charles Buck's popular Protestant reference work, A Theological Dictionary (1818), begins the entry on "keys" with a broad discussion of ecclesiastical power but quickly turns to a lengthy enumeration of alleged Catholic her-

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long to the people? / Written by the Reverend, Mr. Richard Mather, who was for many year an eminent teacher of the church in Dorchester in N.E.; Published by his son, Increase Mather, D.D. (Boston: B. Green, 1712), 22; emphasis mine.

15. Joseph Tuckerman, A Sermon, Delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Samuel Gilman (Charleston, S.C.: Miller, 1819), 30. A quarter-century later, Henry Denison Kitchel, Who Gave Thee This Authority? (Hartford, Conn.: John Paine, 1844), 5–7, argued that "ministerial authority consists in no mysterious prerogative or official virtue, investing its acts with supernatural efficacy."

16. Henry Tuke, The Principles of Religion, As Professed by the Society of Christians, Called Friends (New York: Samuel Wood, 1819), 66–67. Among Baptists, Nehemiah Dodge taught that clerical authority rests "with the church to which the person belongs"; the church, in turn, invites a specific preacher to exercise the "grace and gifts" of the keys in a "public manner." Nehemiah Dodge, Descriptions of Gospel Ministers and Their Internal Call (Exeter, N.H.: Josiah Richardson, 1819), 7–8. On ideas about authority and Church governance between 1800 and 1820 as they relate to the origins of Mormonism, see David Holland, "Priest, Pastor, and Power: Joseph Smith and the Question of Priesthood," Restoration Archive Fellows' Papers (Provo, Utah: JFS Institute Working Papers Series, 1997).

esies. Chief among these was the notion that Peter was the sole recipient of authority to govern: rather, "every faithful minister" holds "the keys."[17] By the 1840s, even denominations like the Episcopal Methodists, which often stressed their ability to trace a line of ordination back to Peter through the Church of England, began to distance themselves from the idea of authoritative, lineal keys.[18]

As this sample suggests, several different streams may have carried the phrase "the keys of the kingdom" into Joseph Smith's linguistic milieu.[19] And of course, the biblical passages that first gave rise to the term would have been available to any diligent student of scripture, since Matthew 16, Isaiah 22:20–23, and Revelation 3:7 also associate the "key of David" with governance. However, use of the word "keys" may have been burdened by association with the oft-assailed Catholic belief in the succession of authority.

It is perhaps not surprising that attitudes toward the concept of "keys" are ambivalent and often contradictory, given the intense debates over authority that characterized religious and political life in the early years of the United States. Nathan O. Hatch has suggested that denominations forming the core of the Second Great Awakening held deeply paradoxical attitudes toward authority—many churches "articulated a profoundly democratic spirit" even as they endeavored to establish and maintain organizational coherence and hierarchy. Hatch, working in the tradition of Max Weber, notes that a strongly egalitarian impulse mani-

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17. Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary Containing Definitions of All Religious Terms . . .*, 5th ed. (Philadelphia: Woodward for Woodward, 1818), 246.

18. Peter Douglass Gorrie, *Episcopal Methodism, As It Was, and Is . . .* (Auburn, N.Y.: Derby and Miller, 1852), 251, wondered whether Methodism should continue to trace ordination through the Roman Catholic Church when even some Catholic clergy questioned the veracity of unbroken lineal descent. For a sketch of Methodist ideas about authority and lineal succession, see Marie Mackey, "Priesthood and Ecclesiastical Structure in Early Nineteenth-Century Methodism and Mormonism," *Restoration Archive Fellows' Papers* (Provo, Utah: Working Papers Series, Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 1998).

19. Milton V. Backman Jr., "Awakenings in the Burned-over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 301–20, has shown that many of the denominations discussed here may have been active or influential in upstate New York during Joseph Smith's youth.

fested itself across a wide range of denominations, expressed as a rejection of elitism and rhetorical opposition to authoritarian governance. At the same time, these denominations were themselves often hierarchical in structure, based, for instance, on the exclusive authority of a small number of leaders or even a single individual. Hatch highlights the contradiction in Francis Asbury's Methodism by noting that he "used authoritarian means to build a church that would not be a respecter of persons."[20] Indeed, as the disagreement between John Cotton and Richard Mather shows, differing attitudes about religious authority often existed within the same tradition. This tension may account for a reluctance either to embrace or fully discard the "keys of the kingdom" as a central doctrinal concept. In general, studies of this period by Mormon historians have reached similarly nuanced conclusions, suggesting that both the establishment of democratic governance practices *and* claims to legitimate divine authority were of great interest to denominations active during the Second Great Awakening.[21]

However, none of these early nineteenth-century instances of "keys" predict the central role the word would play in Mormon priesthood theology. If anything, the association of "keys of the kingdom" with Catholic and Episcopal notions of hierarchy and authority would have predicted the opposite, given probable anti-papal sentiment among potential converts. Yet despite its most common association, Joseph Smith made extensive use of the phrase "keys of the kingdom," reinventing the term and transforming it into a foundational concept in Latter-day Saint priesthood theology.

The word "keys" appears only once in the Book of Mormon: Zoram carries the "keys" that allow Nephi to unlock Laban's treasury and retrieve the "plates of brass" that became scripture for Lehi and his descen-

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20. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 9–11. See also Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 20:1121.

21. Mario S. De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 (Spring 1966): 68–88. Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 97–101, points out that "Seekers" were awaiting a dramatic restoration of religious authority, but his analysis of Seeker statements about authority suggests that the group did not use the word extensively, if at all.

dants (1 Ne. 4:20, 24). Yet latter-day revelation introduces the word early. The three earliest verifiable uses of "keys" imply specific ecclesiastical authority and a purposeful distribution of organizational responsibilities: In April 1829, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery are given "the keys of this gift [translation], which shall bring to light this ministry" (D&C 6:28); in June 1830, the Lord promises that "by the keys which I have given shall [Israel] be led"; and, in the same section, Smith is granted "the keys of the mystery of those things which have been sealed" (D&C 35:24-25, 17-18).[22] Through the granting of discrete "keys," these revelations establish specific avenues through which God can communicate with his chosen people.

These early references recall several uses of "keys of the kingdom" available in the early nineteenth century but do not wholly adopt any of them. Instead, these passages establish a crucial feature of Joseph Smith's usage: They link specific "keys" to discrete responsibilities and authorities; these "keys" are then entrusted to a limited number of persons: some open the way for the exercise of the gift of translation, others authorize Joseph Smith to lead Israel, and still others suggest access to certain "sealed" mysteries. All three of these capabilities, although they rest on priesthood authority, are not automatically conferred upon all recipients of the priesthood—not every elder may translate or lead Israel. In this sense, early revelations set the stage for the later elaboration of a complex system of specific priesthood offices and capabilities, each possessing its own "key" (see D&C 107). The result is a system in which authority is at once hierarchically structured and widely, even democratically, distributed among a diverse array of offices open to an ever-increasing percentage of male Saints. This diversification brings to mind the tentative efforts at differentiating the "keys" undertaken by John Cotton, but far exceeds it in scope and specificity. While this model of priesthood organization developed significantly between 1829 and 1835, it retained the basic trajectory established early on: the increasing expansion, differentiation, and distribution of priesthood capabilities and offices.[23]

The years following these early revelations brought a further distribution of "keys" to a growing group of priesthood holders. In February

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22. I treat in this article only those D&C verses that also appear in the 1833 *Book of Commandments.*

23. As already noted, some scholars argue for significantly less continuity in

1831, Joseph and twelve elders all received "the keys of the church" (D&C 42:69); in 1832, members of the "High Priesthood" and the "lesser Priest-hood" received keys and offices within these two priesthoods (D&C 81:1-2; 84:19, 25-26). The full phrase "keys of the kingdom" also entered Mormon prophetic discourse during this period, although the first fully documented appearance, in October 1831, did not make the meaning of the term explicit (D&C 65:2). In the spring of 1832, a revelation to Fred-erick G. Williams explained that "the keys of the kingdom" belong exclu-sively to "the Presidency of the High Priesthood" (D&C 81:1-2). Joseph Smith, in his 1832 personal history, links the "Kees of the Kingdom of God" to an "ordinence from on high to preach the Gospel" and to the "confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood."[24] In the next three years, two documents clarified this priesthood structure of keys and of-fices. A March 1833 revelation specified that the First Presidency holds the "keys of this last kingdom" along with the Prophet, but those keys are to be handled "through [Joseph Smith's] administration" (D&C 90:3, 6-7). Later revelations clarified the keys held by the president of the Twelve (D&C 112:16-17) and the patriarch (D&C 124:91-92). By March 1835, the "keys or authority" of the priesthood meant the "right to offici-

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Mormon priesthood theology during this period: an early dedication to "charis-matic" authority, individual spirituality, and prophetic expressiveness that rap-idly gave way between 1829 and 1835 to a hierarchical and authoritarian system headed by Joseph Smith. See Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: Univer-sity of Chicago Press, 1957), 156; Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mor-monism*, 53; Gregory A. Prince, *Power from On High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 10-42; and Quinn, *The Mor-mon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 7. I argue, however, that there are significant con-tinuities during the same period, particularly in the development of the priesthood doctrines, even as I acknowledge the ongoing debate over the date of the conferral of the Melchizedek Priesthood by Peter, James, and John. See Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 20-25; Vogel, *Religious Seekers*, 101-2; Brian Q. Can-non and BYU Studies Staff, "Priesthood Restoration Documents," *BYU Studies* 35, no. 4 (1995-96), 162-208; and Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods," *Ensign* 26, no. 12 (December 1996), 30-47.

24. "A History of the Life . . ." in *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:3. Jessee dates this his-tory's composition between July 20 and November 27, 1832.

ate" in certain standings, the power to "administer in spiritual things," and the right to "power and authority" over "the offices in the church" (D&C 107:8, 10). Six years later, yet another revelation explained the rationale for this distribution: "The above offices I have given unto you, and the keys thereof, for helps and for governments, for the work of the ministry and the perfecting of my saints" (D&C 124:143).[25]

Thus, the concept of "keys" did not leap fully formed into Latter-day Saint theology. Rather, early Mormon documents suggest a gradual process by which a term that was variously moribund, disputed, or viewed with suspicion in other early American denominations was gradually revived and elaborated. In this sense, the word functioned as a doctrinal heuristic around which Joseph Smith significantly reworked familiar ideas about Church governance and divine authority. Over time, he used the "keys of the kingdom" to reclaim the idea of an earthly church built on a hierarchical priesthood structure with divinely authorized prophets and apostles at its head, but which also distributed that priesthood's powers, rights, and responsibilities.

"The Key of Knowledge"

The first definition I have traced—the right to officiate in a specific priesthood office or duty—dominates contemporary LDS understanding of "keys." However, as historian Jill Mulvay Derr and her associates have pointed out, the ascendancy of this limited definition is a relatively recent development: Only during the last half of the twentieth century did the word come to be "precisely defined by Latter-day Saints, and is now exclusively associated with the right to direct the exercise of priesthood authority. These recent refinements in usage, like earlier revisions and clarifying comments, illustrate church leaders' efforts over the past one hundred and fifty years to define and strengthen administrative channels of priesthood authority."[26] *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* gives a similar sense of this current, more limited usage by subsuming all discussion of "keys" under the entry, "Keys of the Priesthood." "Keys" are narrowly defined as an

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25. Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of the Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 39–40, similarly review this gradual elaboration of priesthood power.

26. Ibid., 49–50.

ordained male's right to "preside over a priesthood function, quorum, or organizational division of the Church."[27] While this priesthood denotation was certainly one aspect of early Mormon discourse, the current pre-eminence of "keys" as shorthand for "Keys of the Priesthood" threatens to displace two other important meanings developed by Joseph Smith. The first is the idea that a "key" functions as a tool for interpreting or accessing hidden, mysterious, or obscure knowledge—as a way of "obtaining, in the Prophet's words, 'knowledge and intelligence' from God."[28]

As with "keys of the kingdom," the idea that a key might yield access to greater religious knowledge has several precedents in the verbal universe of the early Republic, though none of these fully anticipate Mormon theological usage. Scriptural sources again provide a starting point. In the New Testament, for example, Christ used "key" in a way not clearly associated with the "keys of the kingdom" when he criticized the scribes and Pharisees: "Ye have taken away the key of knowledge, and them that were entering in ye hindered" (Luke 11:50–54). Although the context is lim-

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27. Alan K. Parrish, "Keys of the Priesthood," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 2:780. A word-search of recent Church publications supports Parrish's point in principle, although "key" retains a certain degree of ambiguity, even in correlated discourse. For example, Elder Durrell A. Woolsey, "An Eternal Key," *Ensign*, November 1990, 43, refers to "priesthood keys of leadership *and* other keys of presidency" (emphasis mine), as if distinguishing between varieties of priesthood and nonpriesthood governance. The meaning discussed in this section that a "key" is a route to greater spiritual knowledge appears in Thomas S. Monson, "The Key of Faith," *Ensign*, February 1994, 2, in which "faith" functions as "the sacred key needed to unlock the treasure which we so much seek." However, James E. Faust, "The Key of the Knowledge of God," *Ensign*, November 2004, 52, apparently sees a less flexible connection between priesthood and knowledge: "Without the [greater] priesthood there can be no fullness of the knowledge of God." An anonymous reviewer usefully noted that official discourse does not necessarily match the laiety's everyday practice; however, my sense is that most contemporary members associate "key" mostly, if not exclusively, with priesthood authority or office.

28. Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 48. The quotation comes from Eliza R. Snow's minutes of the Nauvoo Relief Society meeting, April 28, 1842. See "A Record of the Organization, and Proceedings of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo" (hereafter Relief Society Minutes), Archives, Family and Church History Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

ited, "knowledge" obviously serves here as a gateway to spiritual growth, and lack of a "key" can prevent the earnest seeker from "entering in." While John Cotton treated the "key of knowledge" in this passage as a synonym for faith,[29] the note on this passage (52c) from the Joseph Smith Translation in the current (1979) LDS edition of the Bible reads: "the key of knowledge, *the fulness of the scriptures.*" Thus, in Joseph Smith's recasting of this passage, the scribes and Pharisees have withheld accurate knowledge of scriptural texts from the people.

Correlates to this New Testament idea—that access to the right key opens the way to important knowledge—would have been easy to find during Joseph Smith's lifetime. For example, the usage can be seen in the titles of popular exposés claiming to reveal the inner workings of religious, political, or fraternal organizations. In Antonio Gavin's *A Master-Key to Popery: In Five Parts,* the "key" provided was a detailed (and often rather fantastic) description of the activities and rituals of the Catholic clergy.[30] Publications detailing the inner workings of Freemasonry used similar terminology, although not always on the title page. (See below.) Similarly, "key" was often associated with the concept of a cipher or interpretive apparatus. The opening section of *The Royal Standard English Dictionary . . . First American Edition,* published in 1788, contains "A KEY to this WORK" intended to make the dictionary "intelligible to the weakest Capacity" by explaining the "various sounds of the Vowels and Consonants" used therein.[31] This meaning remains familiar today.

A related use, perhaps closer in spirit to that found in Luke, appears in popular religious writings of the early Republic. In 1787, Lawrence Price published a self-help work that proclaimed itself *A Key to Open Heaven's Gate or A Ready Path Way to Lead to Heaven.* Somewhat less dramatic than its title, the text recommends such uncomplicated strategies as

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29. Cotton, *The Keyes of the Kingdom,* 29, 23–24, states that some "keys" should be "common to all believers" and that "the *key of Faith,* is the same which the Lord Jesus calleth the *key of knowledge.*"

30. Antonio Gavin, *A Master-Key to Popery: In Five Parts* (Newport, R.I.: Solomon Southwick, 1773). The *Oxford English Dictionary,* 2d ed. (1989) defines "key" as "that which serves to open up, disclose, or explain what is unknown, mysterious, or obscure; a solution or explanation" and cites the first example from A.D. 897. Retrieved on November 11, 2004, from http://dictionary.oed.com.

31. Perry William, *The Royal Standard English Dictionary . . . First American Edition* (Worcester, Mass.: Isaiah Thomas, 1788), title page.

loving one's neighbor. Once understood and put into practice, "true knowledge and understanding may very well be termed, 'A key to open the gates of heaven.'"[32]

These three related uses suggest a definition of "key" as a piece of information or protocol that reveals hidden knowledge or opens the way to previously inaccessible rewards. However, these uses also suggest a limit to the enlightenment that can be accessed—they posit a one-to-one correspondence between the key and the benefit gained. Like the key to a map or dictionary, A Master-Key to Popery or A Key to Open Heaven's Gate leave little room for extrapolation, interpretation, transferability, or an increase of the reader's capability or authority. Once the exposé has unfolded its secrets or the self-help strategies have been followed, the usefulness of the "key" has been exhausted. In this sense, the "keys of knowledge" introduced by Joseph Smith differ significantly from these early nineteenth-century meanings. His Nauvoo-period "keys" invariably convey a sense of unfolding individual awareness—an enabling paradigm shift—on the part of the person who makes diligent use of the concept. The possessor is able, through a combination of heavenly intervention and personal effort, to gain increased access to spiritual knowledge and greater power or influence for good.

At least in the beginning, this second sense of the word seems to have emerged together with the first, priesthood-associated meaning. For example, it is a "key" that connects Joseph Smith's priesthood authority with his ability to reveal knowledge: the "greater Priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God" (D&C 84:19). Although the specific kinds of knowledge to be made known are not outlined in this September 1832 revelation, it is the "greater Priesthood" that permits special access to the mysteries. A similarly hybrid usage occurs even earlier in references to the gift of translation: the "key" to the gift of translation is

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32. Laurence Price, A Key to Open Heaven's Gate or A Ready Path Way to Lead to Heaven (Worcester, Mass.: [Isaiah Thomas], 1787), 4. See also Thomas Boston, A Key to Heaven; or, A Call to Flee from the Wrath to Come . . . (Exeter, N.H.: H. Ranlet, 1796) or David Austin, The Millennium; or the Thousand Years of Prosperity (Elizabethtown, N.J.: Kollock, 1794), 409–11.

both a specific authority given to Smith and access to a new kind of knowledge (D&C 6:28).[33]

Although revelations such as these evoke the key-as-authority and key-as-route-to-knowledge definitions simultaneously, the two meanings are just as frequently differentiated in early Mormon discourse, particularly as priesthood keys come to be more narrowly associated with specific offices. By the Nauvoo period, the "key[s] of knowledge" introduced to the Saints do not necessarily require direct priesthood authority or office to function once they have been revealed. For example, in January 1843, Smith explained his specific method for interpreting scripture: "I have a Key by which I understand the scriptures—I enquire what was the question which drew out the answer."[34] Although Smith's prophetic calling is the conduit through which this "Key" is revealed, any listener, member or otherwise, might fruitfully employ it.

Furthermore, although this "Key" aids interpretation just as the legend at the front of a dictionary does, Joseph Smith goes beyond a one-to-one equivalency between the "key" and the secret, a mere decoding. Rather, the advice he gives is intended to provoke a fundamental shift in the reader's understanding of the scriptures that might be transferable to other contexts. When considering any passage of scripture, he advises the reader to reflect on the circumstances that may have prompted it, rather than simply interpreting the passage in isolation. In this example, the specific question involved the parable of the prodigal son. Smith began his exegesis by quoting Luke and reminding his listeners that the Pharisees condemned Christ because he "'receiveth sinners,

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33. Others close to the Prophet also manifest mixed usage. For example, Oliver Cowdery lectures those who presume to judge Joseph Smith, "as though they themselves held the keys of the mysteries of heaven, and had searched the archives of the generations of the world." "Letter II," *Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 2 (November 1834): 32. W. W. Phelps describes a prophet as one "who held the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and could unlock the door that led to heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and gaze upon what was, and is, and is to come." "Letter No. 9," *Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 10 (July 1835): 145. Both are clearly tied to priesthood but vague about the exact nature of that tie.

34. Address, January 23, 1843, Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 161; Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1902–32; 1967 printing), 5:261.

and eateth with them.' This is the keyword which unlocks the parable of the prodigal son."[35]

This "keyword" differs significantly from that "key" provided by an exposé of Catholicism or Masonry, where the reader passively observes as a secret is disclosed. Rather, Joseph's "keyword" requires the active re-alignment of an individual's assumptions and approach to a problem: Only then can the listener access formerly mysterious truths about God and his teachings. Furthermore, this mode of learning may be practiced by anyone who learns about the "Key" and is willing to use it. In this sense, such "keys" stressed knowledge that was gained personally rather than being dictated by clergy or even revealed through a prophet. Smith provides the "key," but the individual student must study the parable in its light. During the Nauvoo period, "key" was frequently used in this way: as a piece of information or a technique that could transform the way the Saints saw the world.[36]

Such a recognition of the individual's capacity to acquire knowledge can be seen in another use of "key" during the Nauvoo period. On May 21, 1843, Joseph Smith described three "keys" to help the Saints gain salvation: first, that "Knowledge is the power of Salvation"; second, that the Saints are to "Make [their] calling and Election Sure"; and third, that "it is one thing to be on the mount & hear the excellent voice &c &c. and another to hear the voice declare to you you have a part & lot in the kingdom."[37] Although Smith's meaning is somewhat ambiguous, the statement affirms, on the one hand, that knowledge is intimately connected with salvation (3 Ne. 5:20), and, on the other hand, that each individual must personally seek "Salvation." The intriguing third key reinforces this point by distinguishing between passive recipients of "the excellent voice &c &c" and those whose engagement with revelation gives them "a part & lot in the kingdom." This passage reinforces the

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35. Ibid., 161.

36. For example, in 1840 the Saints received "a key: every principle proceeding from God is eternal and any principle which is not eternal is of the devil." In an April 1842 editorial, a key was provided to "try the spirits" and identify those that came from God. In December 1842, "false teachers and imposters" could be detected by this key: they will "[deny] the spirit of prophecy." Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 181, 204, 269. These "keys" do not depend on priesthood office or authority for their application.

37. Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 206.

idea that Smith's "key[s] of Knowledge" complement the operations of the priesthood "keys of the kingdom." Where priesthood keys operate in a top-down fashion, distributing revelation and governance through authorized and highly structured channels, "key[s] of knowledge" establish an opposed, but complementary, channel for the acquisition of eternal truth. Each individual is responsible for acquiring or accepting "key(s) of knowledge," then putting them to personal use to come closer to salvation and provide eternal benefit to those around them. Smith revealed this same concept in April 1843: that whatever principle of "knowledge" and "intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection" (D&C 130:18–19).

Statements by other prominent, early Latter-day Saints provide evidence that the connection between a "key of knowledge" and individual spiritual development had caught hold of Smith's audience.[38] Eliza R. Snow's poem, now the text for the popular hymn "O My Father," explains:

> I had learned to call thee Father,
> Thru thy Spirit from on high;
> But, until the key of knowledge
> Was restored, I knew not why.[39]

Here, the "key of knowledge" is the doctrine, apparently taught on several occasions by Joseph Smith, that God the Father has a female counter-

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38. The equivalency between "key" and something that opens the way to the unknown or obscure recurs throughout the nineteenth century. The writings of Orson and Parley Pratt provide two of the most familiar continuities in this regard, since both published theological treatises with titles in which "key" figures prominently. Parley P. Pratt introduces his book with the hope that his work will provide "an introductory key to some of the first principles of the divine science . . . [and] if it serves to open the eyes of any of his fellowmen, on the facts of the past, the present, and the future . . . it will have accomplished the end aimed at by THE AUTHOR," Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855), xiv; similar uses occur in Orson Pratt, *The Key to the Universe* (Liverpool: William Budge, 1879).

39. Eliza R. Snow, "My Father in Heaven," *Times and Seasons* 6, no. 17 (November 15, 1845): 1039.

part.[40] This knowledge of divine parentage, of a Mother in Heaven, affirms Snow's original feeling that "Father" is an appropriate form of address. Like the "key" that will enable readers to better interpret all of Christ's parables, this revealed piece of information can transform paradigms—in this case, Snow's conception of deity. Yet she must also apply her own understanding—her own "reason"—to ratify the implications of this crucial "key of knowledge" as part of her ongoing petition to God for more knowledge. She first poses, then answers, a rhetorical question:

> In the heavens are parents single?
> No, the thought makes reason stare!
> Truth is reason; truth eternal
> Tells me I've a mother there.

Although the "key" revealed by Joseph Smith puts Snow's speaker on the track to greater knowledge, she must confirm and process the key's significance using her own "reason." The uncertainty of the first stanza ("When shall I regain thy presence?" and "Was I nurtured by your side?") is transformed into confident and deeply personal entreaties to her heavenly parents: "Father, Mother, may I meet you / In your royal courts on high?" and "With your mutual approbation / Let me come and dwell with you." This "key" resolves the speaker's crisis of knowledge about the nature of deity and affirm her self-worth as the child of two eternal parents.

The complex relationship between priesthood "keys," which channel revelation, and individuals' use of revealed "key[s] of knowledge" is useful in interpreting another important but sometimes controversial moment in Mormon history: Joseph Smith's address to the Relief Society on April 28, 1842.[41] Smith explained: "This Society is to get instruction thro' the order which God has established—thro' the medium of those appointed to lead—and I now turn the key to you in the name of God and this Society shall rejoice and knowledge and intelligence shall flow down

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40. See Linda P. Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, edited by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 65–67.

41. My analysis of this event owes a large debt—both in terms of argument and evidence—to Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 23–58.

from this time."[42] If "keys" are understood to be exclusively associated with the authorized exercise of a priesthood office, the phrase "I now turn the key to you" becomes difficult to interpret. In fact, it seems that, as early as 1855, the Quorum of the Twelve worried that this phrasing might imply that the Prophet had granted the Relief Society some form of priesthood authority. The quorum solved that problem by amending Eliza R. Snow's minutes, changing "I now turn the key to you" to read "I now turn the key in your behalf."[43] Yet, the anxiety about possible misinterpretation expressed in such a change relies on an anachronistically narrow concept of what Joseph Smith meant by using "key" in his address to the Relief Society. Because Joseph Smith was operating with multiple meanings of that word during the Nauvoo period, readings of the phrase "I turn the key to you" should consider how these other meanings may have influenced the reception of his statement.[44] That is, as we have seen, not all of Joseph Smith's "keys" require priesthood office to function. Joseph Fielding Smith clarified in 1958 that not all legitimate forms of religious authority come through the priesthood: "While the sisters have not been given the priesthood, it has not been conferred upon them, that does not mean the Lord has not given unto them authority.

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42. "Relief Society Minutes," 28 April 1842, quoted in ibid., 47. Original spelling preserved.

43. "Relief Society Minutes," April 28, 1842; see Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant,* 49; and *History of the Church,* 4:604-7.

44. That Joseph Smith did not narrowly define the term "keys" as priesthood authority can be seen from other sections of his address to the Relief Society the same day. "He exhorted the sisters always to concentrate their faith and prayers for, and place confidence in those whom God has appointed to honor, whom God has placed at the head to lead—that we should arm them with our prayers—that the keys of the kingdom are about to be given to them, that they may be able to detect every thing false—as well as to the Elders." "Relief Society Minutes," April 28, 1842. This statement is best read as a reference to the long-promised "keys" of discernment to be received in the temple endowment that was introduced to both men and women a few days later on May 4, 1842. See "Keyword as Password" below. According to Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant,* 447 note 80, "Whether, on this occasion, the Prophet was referring to Relief Society or priesthood leaders 'placed at the head to lead' is not clear." The same uncertainty can be seen in Smith's statement: "This society is to get instruction thro' the order which God has established—thro' the medium of those appointed to lead."

Authority and priesthood are two different things."[45] By "turning the key" to the sisters, Joseph Smith may not have conferred the priesthood, but he did grant the "Relief Society the authority to act in all things within the scope of its commission."[46] From my perspective, the 1855 decision to revise Snow's minutes signals the rapidity with which some Nauvoo-period definitions lost ground in Mormon discourse to the single concept of "Priesthood keys."

As Nauvoo documents show, however, "key" could carry both a priesthood meaning (hierarchical channels of instruction and governance) and a "key of knowledge" connotation, suggesting the individual reception and deployment of crucial revealed information. Indeed, it may have been the very flexibility of the term that made it so appealing to Joseph Smith at a time when he was introducing new ideas at a rapid rate. In the end, the temple endowment—the most important of these novel doctrines—linked the two uses of the word. While very limited elements of current Mormon temple worship were introduced in Kirtland in 1836, the full endowment was first introduced in Nauvoo on May 4, 1842, and to a widening circle of Saints from then on. In those ceremonies, an emerging variation on the "key of knowledge" described routes or principles by which one might acquire greater knowledge of the mysteries of heaven. However, its defining feature was an emphasis, not on discrete bits of knowledge or protocols for learning, but on embodied signs or words that functioned as "keys."

"Keyword" as Password

An important revelation that signaled the emergence of this new, radically embodied meaning of "key" related to the nature of heavenly messengers. In February 1843, Joseph Smith explained how to differentiate among three kinds of eternal beings: "When a messenger comes saying he has a message from God, offer him your hand and request him to shake hands with you." The being would respond in one of three ways, his choice signalling "three grand keys whereby you may know whether any administration is from God" (D&C 129:9). On one hand, this revelation provided a simple method for discerning between good and evil. On the

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45. Joseph Fielding Smith, quoted in Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 49.

46. Ibid., 48.

other hand, this test goes beyond the merely practical by implying a new system for understanding both the nature of eternal beings and the inter-action of the heavenly and earthly spheres. Even more importantly, it al-lowed each individual Saint to actively participate in the order of heaven by granting any person who knew the method to act as arbiter in the trans-mission of knowledge from heaven to earth. Anyone could, without the aid of priesthood authority, judge for himself or herself whether "any administration is from God."

Finally, this gesture—offering to shake the hand of an otherworldly visitor—alludes to an element of corporeality and concreteness that is new to the notion of a "key" in Mormon discourse. That is, why would properly recognizing heavenly personages require the physical token of a handshake? In this section, I explore how physical as well as verbal tokens begin to take on increasing importance during the Nauvoo period, a shift signaled, in part, by Joseph Smith's introduction and increasingly fre-quent use of "keyword" rather than just "key."[47] This change in terminol-ogy from "key" to "keyword" implies that individual utterances or physi-cal gestures, like the handshake specified in Doctrine and Covenants 129, can grant the individual who gives the test significant power to find truth. On one hand, the idea that a "key" might serve as a password or shibboleth conforms with the second definition I have sketched, in that use of the "key" promises knowledge, transformed understanding, and even a kind of authority. On the other hand, it also modifies that second definition by lending it specificity and physicality. That is, while the "key to knowledge" is typically an abstract principle or concept, this new kind

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47. Smith used "keyword" somewhat ambiguously in describing his method for interpreting parables. "This is the keyword" seems to refer to an en-tire sentence from the New Testament rather than to just one word ("'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.' This is the keyword which unlocks the parable of the prodigal son.") Elsewhere, the Prophet refers to single "keywords." For example, after acknowledging that he did not yet have prophetic insight into every difficult textual question, he stated in April 1843: "Everything that we have not a keyword to, we will take as it reads." Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* 298. In the same address (April 8, 1843), while explicat-ing Revelation 12:9, Smith explained: "[There] is a mistranslation of the word dragon in the second verse": it should be translated "devil" and not "dragon"—"I give this as a key to the elders of Israel." Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith,* 187.

of "grand key" or "keyword" is necessarily embodied—a spoken phrase or physical action.

It was in his public discourses at Nauvoo that Joseph Smith began to explain how certain gestures and utterances might act as "keywords" in opening the way to greater celestial knowledge and in empowering the Saints to enter God's presence. In a sermon on May 1, 1842, Smith defined "the Keys" as "certain signs and words by which false spirits and personages may be detected from true, which cannot be revealed to the Elders till the Temple is completed . . . . The Elders must know them all to be endowed with power."[48] Because the "signs and words" learned in the endowment were both an expression of priesthood authority and a way of literally placing keys to knowledge and salvation in the hands of individual Church members, this new "keys" doctrine brought the hierarchical implications of the "keys of the kingdom" and the democratic implications of the "key[s] of knowledge" into even closer communication.

An important part of explaining distinctively Mormon uses of "the keys of the kingdom" and "the key of knowledge" in this essay has been examining their linguistic context. But in understanding keys as "certain signs or words," such an approach becomes both more challenging and more controversial, entwined as it is with debates about the origins of Mormon temple worship. Scholars have advanced explanations ranging from revelation to wholesale plagiarism. My discussion, however, focuses on ideas about "keywords" that may have been available in the linguistic culture of the early Republic, highlighting Joseph Smith's heuristic use of the term in gradually introducing new doctrines to the Saints.

Few antecedents match precisely the concept of a "key" as a sign or password as it appears in Mormon temple worship. Where potential nineteenth-century sources do exist, it is often difficult to establish a genealogy by which the word may have passed into Joseph Smith's lexicon. For instance, in his extensive inquiry into the relationship between Mormonism and various traditions of vernacular magic extant in the early Republic, D. Michael Quinn suggests that occult and practical magic traditions may have provided material for Joseph Smith's development of temple doctrines with "keyword" coming indirectly from the Jewish Kabbalah, as filtered through popular magic handbooks available during

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48. Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 119–20.

the period.[49] In this tradition, the use of passwords to advance through the heavens formed part of an ideal of eternal progress "central to the occult mysteries of the ancient world."[50] Even more important to Quinn's analysis than the Kabbalah as a philosophical underpinning, though, are the intermediate sources through which such concepts may have come to Smith's attention.

On the concept of "keys," Quinn cites Richard Laurence's 1819 translation of the Gnostic text, *Ascent of Isaiah.* While the work does not actually use the word "key," it does state that "those who watched the gate of that heaven, required a passport" from all persons.[51] Another popular handbook of vernacular magic, Francis Barrett's *The Magus* (1801), combined the practice and theory of magic with a Christian theological outlook. "Keys" appears several times in this work, where it invariably implies a route to knowledge rather than a specific password, phrase, or gesture.[52] Another magic handbook, the *Clavicula Salomonis, or Key of Solomon,* combines biblical extrapolation with practical advice on how to perform magic rituals, and allegedly circulated in manuscript form during

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49. For instance, D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 229–30, quotes Gershom Scholem's 1946 commentary on the Kaballah, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism,* rev. ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), 50, which states that, in the Jewish Gnostic tradition, "the soul requires a pass in order to be able to continue its journey without danger: a . . . recital of magical key-words with which he tries to unlock the closed door." See also Lance S. Owens, "Joseph Smith and Kabbalah: The Occult Connection," *Dialogue* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 117–94, as well as William J. Hamblin's critique of Owens, "'Everything Is Everything': Was Joseph Smith Influenced by Kabbalah?" *FARMS Review of Books* 8, no. 2 (1996): 251–325.

50. Quinn, *Early Mormonism,* 229–30. Quinn discounts the connection between Masonry and the endowment because "no Mason at Joseph Smith's time or thereafter defined the central purpose of Masonic rites to be an ascent into heaven." Quoted and critiqued in Michael W. Homer, "'Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry': The Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism," *Dialogue* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 106–7.

51. On "passports," see Richard Laurence, trans., *Ascensio Isaiae vatis . . .* (Oxford: University Press, 1819), 132; see also Quinn, *Early Mormonism,* 229–30.

52. For instance, Barrett claims that the proper use of magic can "[serve] as a key to the opening of all the treasures and secrets of the macrocosm, or great world," which seems similar to the "key of knowledge" concept. Francis Barrett,

the early nineteenth century.[53] "Keys" in this work strongly resembles Masonic usage, a question I discuss below.[54] Quinn suggests that these texts served as a source for the Mormon concept of temple keys. Indeed, the Kabbalistic tradition and the popular magic manuals available during the early nineteenth century imply that hidden knowledge can be obtained through a "passport" but fail to establish the strong link between these concepts and the language of "keys" and "keywords" so central to Joseph Smith's concept of eternal progression. Furthermore, direct evidence that Joseph Smith had access to these texts is missing.[55] Regarding the influence of vernacular magic on Joseph Smith's thought, I would

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The Magus, or Celestial Intelligencer; Being a Complete System of Occult Philosophy, 2 vols. (1801; reprint Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1967), 1:13-14. Barrett describes his book as "the Perfection and Key of all that has been written" (2:73).

53. Quinn, *Early Mormonism,* xxxvi–xxxvii. It is not clear how widely and in what circles the text was influential.

54. *Clavicula Salomonis* is almost certainly related to the Masonic tradition. Solomon is central to mythic underpinnings of the book: He is introduced as its first owner; the book promises to "open the knowledge and understanding of *magical arts* and sciences" as "a Key openeth a treasure-house." The book is buried with Solomon. His tomb is protected by an angel who allows only the worthiest candidates to read the work. A Babylonian philosopher, Iohé Grevis, discovers Solomon's treasure and is allowed to read Solomon's *Key* after vowing secrecy to the angel. *The Greater Key of Solomon,* edited by L. W. de Laurence, translated by S. Liddell MacGregor Mathers (Chicago: De Laurence Company, 1914), 1-2. This story closely resembles a narrative told in the Royal Arch degree of Masonry. See below.

55. William J. Hamblin is unpersuaded by Quinn's argument of Smith's access to the occult tradition through books or manuscripts. He discards, somewhat peremptorily, the possibility that vernacular modes have significant power to transmit culture, dismissing such forms as part of "a vague and amorphous oral tradition." Hamblin, "That Old Black Magic," *FARMS Review of Books* 12, no. 2 (2000); online version retrieved January 8, 2005, from http://farmsbyu.edu/publications/reviewvolume.php?volume=122number2-2. In "Everything Is Everything," Hamblin similarly critiqued Owens's proposed mechanism of transmission propounded in "Joseph Smith and the Kabbalah." I agree with Hamblin that little evidence exists that the vernacular magic traditions extant in the early Republic retained the degree of philosophic or esoteric detail present in the works Quinn describes; however, I acknowledge the importance of oral culture and modes of transmission at this period. For the Smiths, oral presentation, memori-

add only the following observation to an already heavily researched field: If it is difficult to demonstrate this tradition's influence on Smith, it is perhaps even more difficult to show that the large and increasingly diverse body of Saints in Nauvoo possessed a common background in the Kabbalah or in vernacular magic traditions—or that they viewed such practices with interest or even tolerance. Thus, while some Latter-day Saints may indeed have been familiar with the terms and patterns of vernacular magic, it may be necessary to look elsewhere to find a common linguistic touchstone for the idea of a "keyword" that was widely shared by both Smith and his audience.

Some have argued that the widespread practice of Freemasonry provided just such a common linguistic context within which Joseph Smith could develop new doctrines. That is, in addition to encouraging bonds of brotherhood, participation in "the craft" may have provided a kind of conceptual and linguistic preparation for the endowment. Historians do not hesitate to acknowledge the enthusiastic participation of Nauvoo Mormons in Freemasonry, but the influence of these rituals on the actual structure and wording of the endowment has been hotly disputed.[56] What is clear, however, is that a significant percentage of (male) Saints were familiar with the language of Masonry before they participated in the

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zation, the hearing and preaching of sermons, storytelling, etc., were all powerful conduits for conveying complex ideas. To dismiss nonpublished modes of transmission reifies the notion that written modes are inherently superior to oral modes simply because scholars can more easily reconstruct their genealogy.

56. John Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 248, sees the temple ceremony as evidence of Joseph Smith's "immersion in Freemasonry. . . . The keys to the kingdom were about to be specified, and they were being described in language that implied Masonic meanings." David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), also explores possible connections between Masonry and the endowment. Matthew B. Brown, reviewing Buerger, reverses the direction of influence, arguing that the ceremonies are similar because Masonic ritual retains degenerate elements of the ancient temple ceremony. Brown, "The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship," *Farms Review of Books* 10, no. 1 (1998): 97–131, retrieved January 8, 2005, http://farms.byu.edu/publications/reviewvolume.php?volume=10&number1. Homer, "'Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry,'" 25–47, 75–89, thoroughly summarizes these debates over

endowment. Joseph Smith petitioned for a Masonic lodge in late 1841, and on March 15, 1842, the Nauvoo Lodge was opened. Almost immediately, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon became members. By the end of the Nauvoo period, nearly 1,400 Latter-day Saints belonged to lodges in Illinois and Iowa.[57] Among them were the first five presidents of the Church. Given the gradual introduction of the endowment after May 1842 and before the Nauvoo Temple became ready for use in September 1845, it is clear that most elders would have been exposed to Masonry before they participated in the endowment. Although women were not allowed to participate in Freemasonry, some linguistic evidence suggests that Smith was actively introducing certain Masonic concepts to the Relief Society during this period.[58]

Michael W. Homer has reviewed statements by early Church leaders that demonstrate their respect for the Masonic rites,[59] which were often described as preparation for the endowment. Shortly after the introduction of the endowment, for instance, Heber C. Kimball wrote to Parley P. Pratt: "Thare is a similarity of preast Hood in masonary. . . . Joseph ses Masonary was taken from preasthood but has become degenrated. but menny things are perfect."[60] In 1843, Joseph Fielding even more explicitly explained to a correspondent that "many have joined the Masonic institution. This seems to have been a stepping stone or preparation for something else, the true Origin of Masonry."[61] Brigham Young later noted that when Joseph Smith received a "revelation and command-

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influence and generally provides the most thorough effort to sketch the relationship between Masonry and Mormon temple worship.

57. Homer, "'Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry,'" 26–33.

58. Ibid., 29, sees Joseph Smith's counsel that the Relief Society should "grow up by degrees," as well as his statement that the sisters should be "sufficiently skill'd in Masonry as to keep a secret," as evidence that Smith was introducing Masonic language and principles. Homer also argues that Joseph Smith's reference to Emma as "the Elect Lady" may also allude to Masonic practice, but, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out to me, this phrase has much more likely antecedents in 2 John 1:1, also the likely source for Doctrine and Covenants 25:3.

59. Ibid., 67–89.

60. Heber C. Kimball, Letter to Parley P. Pratt, June 17, 1842, Parley P. Pratt Papers, LDS Church Archives. By "priesthood," Kimball meant the endowment.

61. Letter dated December 22, 1843; quoted in "'They Might Have Known

ment" to restore the endowment, he was also given a "pattern . . . for with-
out a pattern, he could not know what was wanting, having never seen
one, and not having experienced its use."[62] The language used by these
early Church leaders suggests that they saw participation in Masonry as an
important foundation for those about to receive the endowment or
working to understand its meaning.

In keeping with my broader thesis, I would like to stress the linguis-
tic and conceptual elements of the preparation Masonry may have offered
the Mormon men who participated. As we have seen, Joseph Smith fre-
quently deployed terms and concepts already familiar to his listeners to
render new doctrines more readily comprehensible. In Freemasonry, the
elders would have reproduced passwords and gestures to advance through
the degrees of Masonry. As one scholar has phrased it, "The key was a sym-
bol of secrecy in Freemasonry, and Masonic ritual was filled with the
signs, tokens, and handgrips that protected Masonic secrets."[63] These rit-
ual practices, signs, and symbols—crucial to the three basic levels of Free-
masonry (Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason)—may have pre-
pared the Saints for analogous concepts introduced during the
endowment.

Furthermore, "key" figures in important ways in the four degrees of
Masonry that follow Master Mason, especially in the culmination of this

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That He Was Not a Fallen Prophet'—The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding,"
transcribed and edited by Andrew F. Ehat, *BYU Studies* 19 (Winter 1979):
133-66.

62. Brigham Young, April 6, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London
and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855-86), 2:31. Although this passage
does not name Freemasonry, Young later taught that "Solomon built a Temple for
the purpose of giving endowments" and hints that the Masons can trace their his-
tory "back as far as Solomon." Ibid., 18:303; 11:327-28. Franklin D. Richards re-
ferred to "the true Masonry, as we have it in our temples." Quoted in Rudger
Clawson, Diary, April 4, 1899, in Stan Larson, ed., *A Ministry of Meetings: The
Apostolic Diaries of Rudger Clawson* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association
with Smith Research Associates, 1993), 42. See also Homer, "'Similarity of Priest-
hood in Masonry,'" 25, 67-75. Brown, "The Mysteries of Godliness," cites
Benjamin F. Johnson's recollection in his autobiography that Joseph Smith
stated: "Freemasonry, as at present, was the apostate endowments, as sectarian re-
ligion was the apostate religion."

63. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, 248.

series of rites, the Royal Arch degree. While it is not clear that Smith himself completed a degree beyond Master Mason, he and other Nauvoo Freemasons may still have had access to the content of these higher levels.[64] Many Masons considered the Royal Arch degree the most important of the second-tier rites, the "principal of the four degrees conferred by a [Royal Arch] chapter."[65] The narrative of this rite recounts the murder of Hiram Abiff, Masonry's founder, with the resultant loss of the "Master's word"; initiates must then search for this word, "or a key to it."[66] In the sequence of degrees leading up to the Royal Arch, initiates learn the importance of a symbolic "KEY STONE."[67] Other passages in Masonic ritual, while not using "keyword," follow Revelation 2:17 in reiterating the importance of specific words: Initiates are taught that "to him that overcometh will I give . . . a White Stone, and in the Stone a *new*

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64. Homer, "'Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry,'" 33–42, notes the chartering of a Royal Arch Chapter in Springfield, Illinois, in September 1841, the probable exposure of Mormon James Adams to these higher degrees in Illinois, and the wide availability of exposés, including David Bernard, *Light on Masonry: A Collection of All the Most Important Documents on the Subject of Speculative Free Masonry . . .* (Utica, N.Y.: William Williams, 1829); and the Lewiston Committee, LeRoy Convention, *A Revelation of Freemasonry as Published to the World by a Convention of Seceding Masons* (Rochester, N.Y.: Weed and Heron, 1828).

65. William L. Stone, *Letters on Masonry and Anti-Masonry Addressed to the Hon. John Quincy Adams* (1832), 43, quoted in Homer, "'Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry,'" 35.

66. When the initiates find Hiram Abiff's body, they cannot locate anything "but a faint resemblance of the letter G on the left breast." They exclaim, "That is not the Master's word, nor a key to it . . . I fear the Master's word is forever lost!'" William Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry* ([Rochester, N.Y.]: For the author, 1827), 117–18. In "The Second Part: or A Key to the Higher Degrees of Freemasonry . . .," an anonymous exposé appended to William Morgan, *Morgan's Freemasonry Exposed and Explained; Showing the Origin, History, and Nature of Masonry; Its Effect on the Government . . .* (New York: "Published for the Trade," 1882), 121, the initiate finds a box on Abiff's body and unlocks it. It contains crucial words necessary for advancement to an even higher level of Masonry. For an elaborate 1829 version, see Bernard, *Light on Masonry*, 143.

67. In the Mark-Master rite, first of the four Royal Arch degrees, the initiate is shown "two golden Cherubims, supporting between them a KEY STONE, with a circle of eight letters on it." A scriptural lecture follows, stressing the importance of laying out "a foundation, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." Morgan, *Morgan's Freemasonry*, 86–87.

name written, which no man knoweth save him that receiveth it."[68] However, it is difficult to determine whether these higher degrees and their explicit use of "key" were in wide circulation in Nauvoo. Mormon participation can be fully documented only in the first three degrees of Masonry (Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason). Thus, while the three primary degrees of Masonry may indeed have served as a form of conceptual preparation for the endowment, in which specific words and gestures take on new layers of meaning, it is less clear that Masonic ritual made "key" and "keyword" widely available to the Saints. Perhaps more importantly, the use made of the term in Masonry does not fully predict the meaning of "keys" and "keywords" that emerges in the endowment. Instead, it seems to have been Joseph Smith who actively forged the link between the term "keys" and those "certain signs and words" the Saints would encounter in the temple.

The gradual development of this new definition of "keys" was surely aided by the slow introduction of the endowment. On May 4, 1842, the endowment was administered to nine men in the upper rooms of Smith's red brick store. In the following two years, only about ninety men and women received the endowment. It was not available to a wider group of Saints until 1845.[69] However, Smith apparently prepared others by heavily reworking "keys" in his public discourses during this period.

In these sermons, "key" retains elements we have already traced: Joseph Smith continued to teach that the promised introduction of temple "keywords" was possible only through priesthood authority, and that "key" described doctrines or principles that might empower individual Saints to acquire new light and knowledge. Yet Smith gradually attached new specifics to the "key of knowledge." Instead of referring only to priesthood, to learning strategies, or to paradigm shifts, "keys" increasingly referred to "certain signs and words" that would help the Saints avoid de-

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68. Ibid., 90; italics his. See also Avery Allen, *A Ritual of Freemasonry, Illustrated by Numerous Engravings. To Which Is Added a Key to the Phi Beta Kappa, the Orange, and Odd Fellows Societies* (Philadelphia: John Clarke, 1831); Malcolm C. Duncan, *Duncan's Ritual and Monitor of Freemasonry* (New York: McKay Publishing, 1865); George Oliver, *The Antiquities of Freemasonry* (London, 1823); and Lewiston Committee, *A Revelation of Freemasonry.*

69. Homer, "'Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry,'" 33–35; Quinn, *Early Mormonism,* 278.

ception.[70] In April 1843, for instance, the white stone (Rev. 2:17) "is given to each of those who come into the celestial kingdom, whereon is a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it. The new name is the key word" (D&C 130:10-11). The March 1842 publication of the Book of Abraham "Facsimile No. 2" notes that certain figures represent the "grand Key-words of the Holy Priesthood" (Pearl of Great Price). Both passages allude to and expand upon principles taught during the endowment—that a "new name" can act as a vital "Key-word," that "Key-words" are related to the priesthood, and that such words are essential to progress in the eternities.[71]

Yet by returning an embodied physicality (whether word or gesture) to "key"—an attribute that is, after all, characteristic of the literal meaning of the word—the temple ceremony also binds together the concept of priesthood keys and the "key of knowledge." Although "keys" are embedded in and revealed through a ceremony enabled by the priesthood, "certain signs and words" also grant the individual power both to discern and to act on their own behalf. To avoid discussing an ordinance that Latter-day Saints consider sacred, it may be useful to return to D&C 129 as an example of this kind of "key." In that revelation, a messenger of unknown origin approaches the key-holder, who has both a "key of knowledge" (how to proceed when confronted with a supernatural envoy) and the right to ask the visitor for a "key" (by inviting the messenger to shake hands). Thus, although the original knowledge necessary to act is conveyed through priesthood channels in the form of a revelation, the power to act—the initiative in this encounter between heaven and earth—is retained by the individual. In the same way, the temple ceremony allows women and men to give and receive all the "keys" they need to both initiate and conclude their own progress through the eternities. As Brigham Young explained to the Saints in 1853: "Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the house of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk

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70. Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 119-20.

71. *Pearl of Great Price*, 1979 edition, 36-37. This explanation accompanying Facsimile Number 2 continues: one of the governing planets "borrow[s] its light from Kolob through the medium of Kae-e-vanrash, which is the grand Key, or . . . governing power." This usage recalls "key" as both priesthood authority and key of new knowledge.

back into the presence of the father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell."[72] Furthermore, as time passed, the temple endowment's crucial keys were extended to all those worthy to receive them, to women as well as men, thereby surpassing the limitations of Free- masonic rites.

The question of Freemasonry's influence has been controversial, with some historians seeing direct causation, others vigorously rejecting any relationship at all, and others at some point on the spectrum.[73] It is my hope that closer attention to the complex ways in which words like "key" enter Mormon theology—and how they change once there—may provide an alternative to these often contentious debates over the question of influence. After all, early Mormon revelation repeatedly acknowledges that the language of scripture and revelation is necessarily launched into a fallible and contingent network of preexisting meanings and shades of meanings—what Joseph Smith described as the "narrow prison" of a "crooked broken scattered and imperfect" language.[74] For this reason, even when the specific words and phrases of revelation are delivered through the power of the Spirit (D&C 18:34-35), listeners must still fall back, to some degree, on their own limited understandings and existing lexicons. For instance, we can suppose that Joseph Smith had, among other things, the attributes and limitations of language in mind when he made this statement about the power of culture and tradition to inhibit the introduction of new principles: "I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them . . . will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions."[75]

Clearly, Joseph Smith understood how cultural traditions might limit the speed at which new doctrines could be introduced. And yet, I ar-

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72. Brigham Young, April 6, 1863, *Journal of Discourses,* 2:31.

73. Brown, "The Mysteries of Godliness," argues that the full endowment was revealed to Joseph Smith before he encountered Freemasonry.

74. The formal failings of the text of Joseph Smith's letter to William W. Phelps reinforce the fallibility and mutability of language styles—a point sometimes lost when spelling, grammar, and punctuation are standardized.

75. *History of the Church,* 6:18-85.

gue that the same principle may also operate in reverse. That is, Smith regularly found ways to make productive and pedagogic use of the Saints' "traditions" by harnessing words and concepts already available to his listeners and then gradually modifying them in an effort to better explain complex and original—even radical—doctrines. If the Prophet was correct in the Saints' tendency to "fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions," then introducing the endowment ceremony in wholly unfamiliar terms would have been extremely difficult. The deployment of "key" in the discourse about the temple was one strategy that allowed the Saints to understand the endowment as both an extrapolation of already familiar doctrines and the expression of new truths in a new way.

Conclusion

Between 1829 and 1844, Joseph Smith drew on several distinct valences of a relatively common word, even as he gradually stretched and developed these received understandings. First, the often vague or even unpopular notion that the "keys of the kingdom" were connected to the idea of religious authority was gradually transformed into the elaborate system of specific and hierarchically ordered authorities and responsibilities that distinguishes Latter-day Saint priesthood organization. Second, Smith made use of "key" as a cipher or means for proper interpretation, although, again, he did not allow this definition to rest. In Mormonism, true "keys" do not provide simple answers or one-to-one translations; rather, they provoke fundamental and empowering changes in perspective and understanding, enabling individuals and groups to transform how they think about the mysteries of godliness and the order of heaven. In the Relief Society's case, for instance, he turned a "key" to them, allowing "knowledge and intelligence [to] flow down" upon them that enhanced the society's ability to govern itself and oversee its stewardships. Other "key[s] of knowledge" granted to individual Saints increased agency and control over their acquisition of knowledge. Rather than relying on Joseph Smith to instruct them in all things (D&C 58:26), members could apply their own reason to theological problems, as Eliza R. Snow did, or determine on their own whether messengers claiming to come from God were telling the truth.

Joseph Smith's introduction of the endowment connected these first two meanings in unexpected ways. Both by publicly teaching that

specific words and phrases could enable access to truth and by encouraging the brethren to participate in Freemasonry, Joseph Smith prepared the ground for the introduction of "key words" in the temple. The endowment, in turn, gave the Saints "the key words, the signs and tokens," as Brigham Young stated, to "walk back into the presence of the father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels."[76] On one hand, temple worship is predicated on the idea that priesthood keys have been restored and are functioning in their appropriate office and station; furthermore, the temple ceremony is itself an expression of priesthood power. On the other hand, sacred "key words" empower each individual with "all" that is necessary to "walk back into the presence of the father." Effectively, each participant receives the power of life and salvation, if he or she chooses to use it. Thus, temple "keys" bridge what might be seen as two opposed, yet equally fundamental aspects of Mormon theology: the organizational realm of hierarchical priesthood structure and the private theater of individual spiritual action. Individual Saints receive "keys" through priesthood channels but are then free (and obligated by covenant) to use their own agency in deploying them. Crucially, this granting of power extends to women, who, although they are not ordained to priesthood office, are authorized to both give and receive "the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood" in the temple. In this sense, the endowment can be understood as fulfilling Joseph Smith's statement to the Relief Society that "the keys of the kingdom are about to be given to them, that they may be able to detect every thing false—as well as to the Elders."[77]

Finally, I wish to reiterate that the gradual stretching and transformation of the idea of "keys"—from the early elucidation of the function "Priesthood keys" to the eventual introduction of temple "keywords"—represents a doctrinal development that is closely tied to a linguistic development. The meaning of a term that would have been familiar to the Mormon prophet and his audience was gradually transformed by a series of recorded revelations and public addresses, with the result that an old word slowly came to express a dense constellation of doctrines original to Mormonism. By 1844, Latter-day Saint "keys" go well beyond anything one might find in structures of early American church government, at the

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76. *Journal of Discourses* 2:31.
77. "Relief Society Minutes," April 28, 1842.

front of a dictionary, or in the practices of Freemasonry. Rather than carving his way into the minds of his adherents with a "jack-knife"—by introducing new concepts in totally foreign terms—Smith found a term that was familiar enough to be recognizable to the Saints but flexible enough to be transformed. By turning a single "key" word, the Mormon prophet was able to ground an elaborate new system of priesthood governance and introduce a new and striking method for how a soul might direct his or her own triumphant passage into the eternities.